

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama: Immigration Reform Will Strengthen U.S. Security, Economy

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama says the ultimate solution for fixing an immigration system that penalizes immigrants and citizens alike is comprehensive reform that strengthens the nation's security, economy and global competitiveness.

"One way to strengthen the middle class in America is to reform the immigration system so that there is no longer a massive underground economy that exploits a cheap source of labor while depressing wages for everybody else," Obama said in a speech at the Chamizal National Memorial in El Paso, Texas, on the Mexican border.

"Reform will also help to make America more competitive in the global economy," he said.

While the president's trip to El Paso brought renewed focus to the U.S.-Mexico border, Obama noted that of the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, some crossed by sea and air borders illegally, while others broke immigration laws by overstaying their visas.

Most of the security measures that have been created in recent years are getting desired results, lessening crime, preventing violence and blocking some employers from using cheap and illegal labor, but the best approach for Washington is to fix the system as a whole, Obama said. He called for Congress to work with him in crafting a system that will accomplish everyone's goals.

Over the past several weeks Obama has met with leaders and stakeholders from business and law enforcement, faith-based organizations, current and former elected state and local officials, and influential Hispanics from across the United States. He has also discussed immigration-reform legislation with congressional leaders.

In the El Paso speech Obama set out a blueprint for immigration reform and what it must provide:

- Secure the nation's borders and focus enforcement on those who would cause the greatest harm, such as those who engage in illegal drug trafficking and terrorism.
- Hold accountable those employers who deliberately hire and exploit undocumented workers.
- Strengthen the legal immigration system and stop punishing innocent young people who were brought to

the United States illegally by their parents.

- Hold accountable those living here illegally by requiring them to register, undergo a background check, pay taxes and learn English, all before becoming eligible for full citizenship.

"What we really need to do is to keep up the fight to pass genuine, comprehensive reform," Obama told the audience. "That is the ultimate solution to this problem. That's what I'm committed to doing."

While in El Paso for the speech, the president and Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano toured the Bridge of the Americas Port of Entry, the largest of four crossings with Mexico that comprise the El Paso Port of Entry. El Paso Director of Field Operations Ana Hinojosa led the tour of the Bridge Cargo Facility.

The Bridge of the Americas processes inbound and outbound commercial, private vehicle, bus and pedestrian traffic. U.S. Customs agents conduct about a half-billion inspections annually at 327 ports of entry across the nation, and 10 percent are at El Paso, according to the White House.

Syrian Crackdown Shows Government's Weakness, Secretary Clinton Says

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton described the Syrian government's continued crackdown on its political opponents as "brutal" and said the violent response of President Bashar al-Assad's regime against its own citizens is a sign of weakness, rather than strength.

Speaking in Nuuk, Greenland, May 12 with Danish Foreign Minister Lene Espersen, Clinton said hundreds of Syrians have been killed since protesters began peacefully calling for political reforms and greater freedoms in March. Clinton and Espersen were in Greenland for a meeting of the Arctic Council.

The Syrian government is engaging in "unlawful detention and torture and the denial of medical care to wounded persons," Clinton said. "There may be some who think that this is a sign of strength, but treating one's own people in this way is, in fact, a sign of remarkable weakness."

Violence will not solve Syria's political and economic challenges, Clinton said. The increasingly isolated Assad regime's reliance upon Iran for support "is not a viable way forward."

The unrest and the violent crackdown have made it clear that Syria "cannot return to the way it was before," Clinton said. Its future security and stability will come through a government that "reflects the popular will of all of the people and protects their welfare."

The United States is working with other countries to hold Syrian officials accountable for "gross human rights abuses," including building a strong case to "sanction those who are leading and implementing the policies that are coming from the government," she said.

Foreign Minister Espersen called on Syria's government to deliver on its public promises that it will enact political reforms and engage in a national dialogue to address its citizens' concerns.

She said Denmark is among the European Union nations calling for sanctions against Syria and that it is prepared to tighten its restrictions against the Syrian regime if it fails to fulfill its promises of reform.

White House press secretary Jay Carney told reporters in Washington May 12 that the Obama administration has consistently condemned violent responses by Syria and other governments in the region to political unrest and strongly urges them to engage their citizens and make political reforms.

By answering the aspirations of their people, and responding to their demands for greater political participation and economic prosperity, those governments "will find the stability that they claim they seek, because further repression will lead only to further and greater instability," Carney said.

World Uniting Around Insistence that Libya's Qadhafi Must Go

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — International cooperation has increased the pressure on Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi's regime and made it harder for it to carry out attacks against the Libyan people, a senior State Department official says, adding that the Obama administration will continue its efforts to support the Libyan people through economic, military and political means.

Speaking to the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee May 12, Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg said that through the imposition of a no-fly zone, an arms embargo, the freezing of assets and travel bans, the international community is sending a clear message to Qadhafi and his regime that "there's no going back to the way things were."

"The international community is increasingly united around a shared insistence that Qadhafi must go," Steinberg said.

Libya's National Oil Corporation and central bank have been "blacklisted," he said. The financial sanctions have deprived Qadhafi's regime of funds and assets it could use to suppress the Libyan people.

Steinberg said the regime was forced to halt its oil exports and is having difficulty obtaining refined petroleum. In addition, he said there are indications that "the regime can no longer afford to pay its supporters to attend rallies and demonstrations."

The Obama administration and other governments plan to take further unilateral steps to "tighten the squeeze on regime officials and regime-affiliated banks, businesses and satellite networks," Steinberg said.

At the same time it is denying support to the Qadhafi regime, the United States is supporting Libya's main opposition group, the Transitional National Council, with up to \$25 million worth of nonlethal aid, including medical supplies, boots, tents, rations and personal protective gear, he said.

Steinberg also said the United States is providing more than \$53 million in humanitarian assistance in Libya and is continuing to look for additional ways to support humanitarian operations in the country.

Following the Arab League's March 12 call for a no-fly zone and arms embargo against Libya, which was endorsed by the United Nations Security Council, the United States initially took the lead in enforcing the military effort, but its role since has evolved to primarily offering support to NATO, which assumed command of the operation.

"Of the over 6,000 sorties flown in Libya, three-quarters have been flown by non-U.S. coalition partners. All 20 ships enforcing the arms embargo are European or Canadian, and the overwhelming majority of strike sorties are now being flown by our European allies," Steinberg said.

The Senate committee chairman, Senator John Kerry, said that when the military action began against Qadhafi's forces, the Libyan people were facing a humanitarian catastrophe, and the international effort has now given them "a fighting chance for a better future."

He also said failure to take action would have allowed Qadhafi to demonstrate that violence is an effective means of crushing political dissent.

"I think the message across the Arab world, across North Africa and into the Middle East would have been significantly damaging to the aspirations of the Arab Spring and to other interests that we have," Kerry said.

World Health Leaders Meet to Tackle Health Challenges

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington — Public health officials from almost 200 nations will be in Geneva May 16-24, trying to devise strategies to address the many health problems that shorten life and diminish its quality for millions of people.

U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius will lead a U.S. delegation of about 25 to the World Health Assembly, an annual gathering for member states of the World Health Organization (WHO).

A recently issued report by WHO will shape the discussion. Released in late April, the first WHO Global Status Report on Noncommunicable Diseases announced that diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease and diabetes cause the greatest number of deaths each year — 63 percent of all deaths worldwide in 2008.

At a ministerial meeting on health lifestyles and noncommunicable disease control in April, HHS Secretary Sebelius characterized the severity of the problem of chronic diseases in the United States and other nations.

"Partly because these diseases are becoming more common, some experts have warned that this generation of American children could be the first to have shorter life spans than their parents," Sebelius said at the Moscow event.

HHS spokesman Bill Hall said one U.S. priority for the assembly will be to engage in discussions with health leaders from other nations to exchange ideas on effective strategies against noncommunicable diseases. Prevention of these conditions through the promotion of healthy lifestyles is one top strategy, as well as providing effective care to contain conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease in their early stages.

HHS said that other issues of importance for the United States include the debate surrounding smallpox virus retention or destruction and the issue of polio eradication.

Sebelius explained to her April audience that the United States will be helping to support Centers of Excellence in nine countries where regional research will examine the

burden of chronic disease in partnership with local institutions.

On another topic, participants in the assembly will hear a briefing on the public health impact of the accident at the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear reactor in Japan. The core structures designed to enclose the reactors were damaged in the March event, and radiation leaks have resulted, though the full damage of the radioactive material release is not yet fully understood.

As of May 5, the International Atomic Energy Agency still characterized the incident as "serious."

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